

'Militant' victory against Florida prison censorship

BY SETH GALINSKY

We won another round against prison censorship in Florida! The Florida Department of Corrections Literature Review Committee informed the *Militant*'s lawyer David Goldstein Dec. 7 that the impoundments of both the Oct. 30 and Nov. 6 issue "were overturned. Those issues will be allowed into Florida correctional institutions."

This is a victory for free speech, freedom of the press and for the rights of workers behind bars.

The *Militant* sees workers behind bars just like we see workers in the factories, mines, mills and retail — political people, targets of the bosses relentless drive to intimidate, punish, divide and weaken the working class, to prevent us from organizing to challenge their political rule and their dog-eat-dog capitalist system.

We make special efforts, including offering subscriptions at reduced rates, to engage in political discussion with fellow workers in prison, and to inform them about the revolutionary views and activities of the Socialist Workers Party. This includes publicizing books written by leaders of the party, and offered to inmates at reduced rates by Pathfinder Press.

The Oct. 30 issue was banned for an article reporting that the Literature Review Committee had reversed four and upheld three of seven previously impounded issues of the paper in Florida prisons this year. The ban on the Nov. 6 issue was more sweeping because prison authorities charged the *Militant* itself "encourages protesting and group disruption" and was "dangerously inflammatory in that it advocates or encourages riot, insurrection" and "may lead to the use of physical violence."

The rapid reversal of the ban — in the face of the *Militant*'s challenge backed by a growing number of letters from civil liberties groups, churches and others — underscores the fact that the attempt to keep the *Militant* out of the hands of subscribers behind bars was arbitrary and unconstitutional.

Amnesty International USA, PEN America, New York's Riverside Church Prison Ministry, the Alianza Martiana in Florida and the Seattle-Cuba Friendship Committee



Florida prison officials impounded Nov. 6 issue of the *Militant*, above, accusing it of encouraging "riot, insurrection." Among articles and ads were ones promoting Idaho silver miners strike solidarity rally, above right, and protests against U.S. embargo of Cuba.

were among those who sent letters demanding the ban be overturned.

Letter from Walmart workers

Three workers at a Walmart store in Philadelphia were just about to send their letter when they learned of the victory. "We read the *Militant* ourselves, and think that it is a really good paper," they wrote. "Reading the *Militant* is a wonderful opportunity for the workers in prison to say informed about what is going on in the world."

Dean Peterson, head of the Literature Review Committee, responded to several of the letters, claiming the committee's "actions are directed by the rules set forth in the pertinent sections of the Florida Administrative Code (FAC), from which we cannot deviate."

In addition, he wrote, the code "makes no provisions in this process for participation by outside parties, but your support of 'The Militant' has been noted."

The United States has both the highest absolute number of prisoners in the world and the highest per capita incarceration rate. According to the latest figures, there are some 7 million people — 1 in 35 adults — in federal or state prison, local jails or on parole or probation.

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The overwhelming majority never had a chance to face a jury of their peers: 97 percent of federal and 94 percent of state convictions in criminal cases are from so-called plea bargains. From top to bottom, the capitalist criminal "justice" system is stacked against working people.

Workers viewed as 'deplorables'

Who are the people who are incarcerated? They are the same people who Hillary Clinton during her presidential run put into the "basket of deplorables" and "irredeemables." They're workers in rural areas and small cities — and working-class ghettos in the class-divided big cities, disproportionately African-American — most ravaged by the crisis of capitalist profit rates, production and trade today.

They are U.S.- and foreign-born alike, Caucasian, Black, Latino, Asian, Native American. Those who have lived in towns where factory closings have left millions without jobs. Neighborhoods ravaged by opioid addiction.

The *Militant* currently has 119 subscribers behind bars in 64 state or federal prisons across the country. The victory in Florida can help win larger numbers of prisoners to subscribe to the paper. Show it to fellow inmates, family members and friends. Tell them how to subscribe. Use the paper to organize political discussion. Write to us about what you think.

"In the United States, imprisonment is a way of dehumanizing a human being. It's a way of isolating you from society, including from your family," said Ramón Labañino, one of five Cuban revolutionaries who were framed up and imprisoned in the United States in 1998, in an interview published in the book *"It's the Poor Who Face the Savagery of the US 'Justice' System."*

"An individual ends up isolated from everything, not knowing how to confront this monster," Labañino said.

The *Militant*, publicizing the program of the Socialist Workers Party, backing its candidates for public office, and reporting on the struggles of working people around the world helps to break down the barriers between the life of

prisoners and life beyond those walls.

Conditions in prison are often atrocious and Florida prisons are no exception. The *Miami Herald* has run a series of articles detailing the abusive conditions in Florida prisons. In a July 19 article it reported how "in prison after prison over seven months ... toilet paper, toothbrushes, toothpaste, pillows, sheets, shirts and soap were often withheld from inmates."

On Nov. 29 the paper reported on the case of Randall Jordan-Aparo, who died in prison in 2010 after prison guards sprayed him with pepper gas after he demanded to be taken to a hospital because of a severe medical condition.

Prisoners — and the *Militant* — have the right to publicize abusive conditions and work to change them.

The Socialist Workers Party uses the *Militant* and books published by Pathfinder Press to help working people better understand how capitalism works, why workers need to unite and take action independent of the capitalist parties on the road to taking political power out of the hands of the propertied rulers. The party collaborates with workers in today's struggles and seeks to convince them to join the SWP.

Workers behind bars are no different than those outside the prisons. They need a revolutionary party for the working-class battles ahead.

"We plan to use this victory to defend freedom of press and freedom of speech and to help others do the same," *Militant* editor John Studer said Dec. 8. "We will also use it to deepen the work of the Socialist Workers Party in the working class, including that section of the class inside prison walls."

Special offers for prisoners

Pathfinder Press offers books and pamphlets at a 50% discount off the cover price. There is a flat rate of \$2.75 for shipping and handling. Friends and relatives can order online at these special rates. Prisoners can mail prepaid orders to:

Pathfinder Press, PO Box 162767
Atlanta GA 30321-2767

Friends can order for prisoners at
pathfinderpress.com

The *Militant* offers low-cost subscriptions for prisoners. Prisoners, family or friends can send \$6 for a 6-month subscription. Prisoners who cannot afford to pay can request a complimentary subscription.

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'Militant' Prisoners' Fund

The Prisoners' Fund makes it possible to send prisoners reduced rate subscriptions. To donate, send a check or money order payable to the *Militant*, earmarked "Prisoners' Fund," to 306 W. 37th St., 13th Floor, New York, NY 10018.